

**Decision Memorandum on Action and for Application of:  
Categorical Exclusion 1.12  
Keystone Peak Communication Site Firebreak**

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Tucson Field Office  
Cochise County, Arizona

**PART I: PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

**Hazardous Fuels Reduction Firebreaks recommended for the Keystone Peak Communication Site.**

The proposed action is a fire mitigation project proposed by the Safford/Tucson Fire Management Zone (STFMZ) for public lands or private lands at risk from fires spread from BLM public lands. This project focuses on protection of life and property on Keystone Peak from wildland fires coming from BLM land. Arizona State Land Department's (ASLD) Forestry Division has proposed this fuels reduction project, since the agency is mandated to protect private property from wildfire damage. ASLD has deemed this communication site as one of their higher priority fuels reduction projects. Conversely, this firebreak will reduce the risk of fires spreading on BLM lands that originate on private property, by creating a defensible space for wildland firefighters.

The projects will allow BLM fire managers to reduce the wildfire hazard on BLM land through the reduction of hazardous fuels. ASLD fuels crews will remove live and dead fuel through thinning and pruning on BLM and private lands, so that firebreaks can be continuous across property boundaries, allowing for the most effective protection from wildfires for these communities. These firebreaks will complement fuel hazard reduction work that landowners have undertaken.

The hazardous fuels reduction project is 2 acres, of which 0.4 acres is on BLM and 1.6 acres is on private land north and east of this BLM land. The private land is owned by the Sierrita Mining and Ranching Company, referred to as the permittee. Vegetation would be cut, removed or chipped. This includes the cutting, mowing, and removal of hazardous, flammable fuels in accordance with the Permit Stipulations noted below. All operations would be conducted according to ASLD regulations and in a manner that minimizes risk for the ignition of wildfire, erosion of soil, destruction of residual live vegetation, or other environmentally-degrading activity.

**Mitigation Measures/Stipulations:**

1. BLM authorizes ASLD to remove hazardous and flammable fuels **only** on BLM administered land identified on the attached map. ASLD will need to get written authorization from private owners for other land (1.6 acres) to be treated.
2. The following **hand tools** could be used: weed eaters, hand saws, small chain saws, hand winches, and come-alongs are acceptable, or a **mower**, if it meets specifications listed below.
3. **Dead vegetation less than eight inches in diameter** may be removed, as per specific directions from authorized BLM officers. Removal of all dead vegetation in the firebreaks can be cut and removed.
4. Hazardous fuels reduction projects will stress tree spacing, by **focusing on maintaining 15 foot spacing** between leave trees.

**5. The following species are found in the project area:**

**Trees:** Alligator juniper, Emory oak, Arizona white oak

**Perennial grasses:** Lehman's lovegrass, Plains bristlegrass, Green sprangletop, Perennial Threeawn, Spike dropseed, Junegrass, Tanglehead, Side oats grama, Cane beardgrass, Wolftail, Mountain muhly.

**Weeds:** Russian thistle and Datura species

Although the volume of tree and grass species fuels will be reduced to protect the communications site, and improve safety concerns for individuals on the site during a wildfire, they will not be eliminated from the site. Crews will emphasize reducing the weeds to a minimum on the site within the specified guidelines in these mitigation measures.

**6. Live vegetation with basal diameters (4" stump height) no greater than eight inches** may be removed, without authorization from the Tucson Field Office (TFO), Field Manager. **Shrub and tree trunks** will be severed **four inches or less** from the ground. **Ladder fuels** (limbs or branches) will be removed by pruning the lower third of trees and shrubs up to a maximum of eight (8) feet above the ground.

**7. Grasses and forbs** may be cut with a mower, as long as **stubble of at least four inches** is remaining.

**8. All severed material, except grasses and forbs, must be disposed of on the permittee's private property.** Clearing of vegetation by **mechanical vehicles** or equipment is prohibited. **Wheelbarrows** and **small four wheelers** (ATV's will only be used by federal employees or federally contracted crews) with trailers, may be used **if approved in advance** by an TFO Field Manager, as long as the use is compatible with decisions in the Resource Management Plan (e.g., sediment, erosion, root rot disease, aquatic conservation strategy, etc.). An effort to minimize visual effects of ATV tracks will be made as crew pull out ATV equipment from project area. Fuels from these projects can not be sold as firewood.

**9.** Chain saws and ATV's will only be used by federal employees or contracted crews. All mechanized equipment **must** meet ASLD standards, and applicant must have an ASLD operations permit for approved spark arresters. The permittee must obtain an ASLD operations permit. Permittee must comply with all ASLD fire restriction requirements. Fire suppression tools will be kept at hand during all clearing operations, such as: ax, shovel, water, and bucket.

**10.** The uses of herbicides or pesticides are **prohibited**.

**11.** All **survey monuments, witness corners, reference monuments, and bearing trees** will be protected against destruction, obliteration, modification, or damage during the operation.

**12.** If the permittee discovers, encounters, or becomes aware of any **objects or sites of cultural, historical, or paleontological value** (grave markers, historical or prehistorical ruins, graves, old dumps, etc.) on the project area, the land owner will stop all operations and notify the authorized officer **immediately**. Prior to project work, archeologist will be notified, so that field review or clearance to proceed is granted.

**13.** Permittee will undertake every reasonable measure to **minimize erosion, soil disturbances, ground disturbing activity or the introduction of noxious weeds**.

**14.** Permittee will undertake every reasonable measure to **minimize disturbance to live vegetation** not removed for fuel hazard reduction.

15. Permittee will not block or close roads or trails used by the public. Existing telephone, television cable, or electrical transmission structures and lines or existing fences, ditches, roads, trails, or other improvements on the public lands will be protected.

16. Clearing or cutting of **any** material within 10 feet of any stream on BLM land is prohibited to prevent the risk of accelerating erosion. Riparian areas are clearly defined on the attached maps, if applicable.

17. Burning on BLM land is **not** authorized.

18. Permittee may reduce fuels from October 15 through March 31, and as long as fire danger is low or moderate.

19. This authorization is for reducing hazardous vegetation and dead organic material on BLM land that compliments similar work completed on the permittee's property adjacent to BLM.

20. Fuel hazard reduction work will be monitored by STFMZ staff at least once a year, following fuels treatment.

**Plan Conformance:**

- 1) Department of Interior Manual 516 DM, Chapter 2, Appendix 1,1.12 (Hazardous Fuels Thinning)
- 2) 10-year Comprehensive Strategy, Goal #2 (Hazardous Fuels Reduction pg. 9)

The following plan is part of the President's Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI). These hazardous fuels reduction projects are being implemented due to Wildland Urban Interface areas communities-at-risk.

Moreover, to qualify as a hazardous fuels treatment, fuels reduction activities: 1) Will not be conducted in wilderness areas or where they would impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation for wilderness; 2) will not include the use of herbicides or pesticides; 3) will not involve the construction of new permanent roads or other infrastructure; 4) will not include sales of vegetative material that do not have hazardous fuels reduction as the primary purpose; 5) will not exceed 1000 acres for mechanical hazardous fuels reduction activities and will not exceed 4500 acres for hazardous fuels reduction using fire; 6) will only be conducted in wildland urban interface or in Condition Classes 2 or 3, Fire Regime Groups I, II, III, outside the wildland urban interface.

**Specialist Signature**\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**\_\_\_\_\_

**PART II: CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW**

Assignment and Review

Project Name: **Keystone Peak Communication Site Firebreak**Location (legal description): **T18S R11E, Sections 9 and 10**Quad Names: **Sells 1-100,000 BLM Quad**Project Lead: **David Peters, Fire Mitigation Specialist, Safford/Tucson Fire Management Zone****Subactivity 2824**

NEPA #: AZ-420-2005-006

Draft Review: Unit Manager/Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Technical Review:

Exception	NAME	EXCEPTION	SIGNATURE	DATE
Applies? Yes No				
( ) ( )	Bill Auby	(1) Have Significant adverse effects on public health or safety?		
( ) ( )	Francisco Mendoza	(2) Have adverse effects on such unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, parks, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains or ecologically significant or critical areas including those listed on the Department's National Register of Natural Landmarks.		
( ) ( )	Jack Whetstone	(3) Have highly controversial environmental effects.		
( ) ( )	Bill Auby	(4) Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		
( ) ( )	Dan Moore	(5) Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		
( ) ( )	Francisco Mendoza	(6) Individually Insignificant, but cumulatively significant effects.		
( ) ( )	Max Witkind	(7) Have adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.		
( ) ( )	Jack Whetstone	(8) Have adverse effects on species listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		
( ) ( )	Jack Whetstone	(9) Require compliance with EO 11988, 11990 (Protection of Wetlands) or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.		
( ) ( )	Dan Moore	(10) Threaten to violate a Federal, State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		

Approval:

Unit Manager/Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Environmental Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Field Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act**

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 2, appendix 1, 1.12. The application of this categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. The application of this categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect any of the ten exceptions listed in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 (actions that require an environmental assessment).

If any archeological, paleontological, and/or historic resources are encountered during the removal of the mesquite stumps, all work will cease in the immediate area. The TFO archeologist shall be notified. Work will not resume in that area until clearance is given by TFO archeologist. TFO archeologist will be on site during the removal of mesquite stumps.

**Persons and Agencies Consulted**

Steve Cohn, Tucson Field Office (TFO), Assistant Field Manager

**TFO NEPA Team:**

Bill Auby, Geologist

Damon McRae, Acting Fire Management Officer

Linda Marianito, Environmental Coordinator

Francisco Mendoza, Recreation Planner

Dan Moore, Hydrologist

Jack Whetstone, Wildlife Biologist

Max Witkind, Archeologist

Consultation with other agencies was not needed. Access to some of the sites will be through privately owned land.

**Decision and Rationale on Action**

The Firebreaks and fuels reduction for the water flow inlets will be implemented. Risk analysis worksheets identifying potential job hazards have been completed. In addition daily safety briefing will be conducted and documented. I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan and that no further environmental analysis is required.

NEPA #: AZ-420-2005-006

**Implementation Date**

This project will be implemented between the dates of October 15 through March 31. This project will require yearly maintenance (mower, weed eater, grass whip or hand scythe) to control grasses and small brush, biannual thinning of brush/shrubs, and every few years pruning limbs on mesquites.

**Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This project is subject to administrative review or appeal.

**Contact Person**

David Peters, Fire Mitigation Specialist, Safford/Tucson Fire Management Zone, 520.258.7207  
Tucson Field Office, 12661 East Broadway Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85748, [David.Peters@BLM.gov](mailto:David.Peters@BLM.gov).

This project is subject to NEPA team review after five years, to make sure the project standards are appropriate to adequately protect homes from wildfires and to address environmental concerns.

**Part III: DECISION** I have reviewed this plan conformance and NEPA compliance record and have determined that the proposed action does not conflict with major land-use-plans and will not have any major adverse impacts on other resources. Therefore, it does not represent an exception, and is categorically excluded from further environmental review. It is my decision to implement the project, as described, with the mitigation measures attached.

**Authorized Official:**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_